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VOC FOR IOP/FN
BACKGROUNDER 1-0599
HARRY DEBELIUS/MADRID

APRIL 18, 1976

SPANISH POLITICS

ANNCR:

FROM MADRID, VOA CORRESPONDENT HARRY DEBELIUS HAS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT ON THE SPANISH POLITICAL SCENE.

VOICE:

SPANISH PREMIER CARLOS ARIAS SAYS HERE IN MADRID THAT HE WILL TALK TO THE NATION BEFORE THE END OF THIS MONTH ABOUT THE GOVERNMENT'S PLAN FOR DEMOCRATIC REFORM. HIS PROMISE IS IN ANSWER TO GROWING PRESSURE FROM MANY QUARTERS FOR KING JUAN CARLOS' GOVERNMENT TO MAKE GOOD ON ITS PROMISES TO CHANGE THE SYSTEM SET UP BY THE LATE DICTATOR, GENERAL FRANCO.

PREMIER ARIAS WILL MOST LIKELY TALK ABOUT A REFERENDUM AND ELECTIONS. ALTHOUGH IT HAS NOT YET BEEN OFFICIALLY ANNOUNCED, THE SPANISH CABINET IS ALREADY PUTTING THE FINISHING TOUCHES ON A PROPOSED LAW TO SET UP A TWO-CHAMBER PARLIAMENT. BUT THE LOWER HOUSE OF THAT PARLIAMENT WOULD BE ELECTED BY UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE. THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UPPER HOUSE, OR SENATE, IS STILL UNDER DISCUSSION.

THE LOWER HOUSE WOULD BE CALLED THE CONGRESS OF DEPUTIES. IF THERE ARE NO MAJOR SNAGS, I'M TOLD THAT GENERAL ELECTIONS FOR THE LOWER HOUSE MIGHT TAKE PLACE HERE IN SPAIN BY THE END OF THIS YEAR. BUT BEFORE THAT HAPPENS, SPANIARDS WILL BE ASKED TO VOTE IN A REFERENDUM.

AT THE MOMENT, THE SUBJECT OF THE REFERENDUM IS SIMPLY A CHANGE IN THE SO-CALLED FUNDAMENTAL LAWS, WHICH WOULD MAKE IT EASIER FOR MEMBERS OF KING JUAN CARLOS'

FAMILY TO SUCCEED HIM. THE REFERENDUM WOULD PROPOSE REDUCING THE CURRENT MINIMUM AGE FOR A KING FROM THIRTY-TWO TO EIGHTEEN, AND ALLOWING WOMEN, AS WELL AS MEN, TO REIGN.

SOME INFLUENTIAL SPANIARDS FEEL THAT IF THE PEOPLE APPROVE SUCH A REFERENDUM, THEY WILL IMPLICITLY BE ACCEPTING THE MONARCHY, AS REINSTATED BY THE LATE GENERALISSIMO FRANCO. BUT THERE ARE OTHERS WHO THINK THAT NO SUCH CONCLUSION CAN BE DRAWN FROM THAT KIND OF REFERENDUM, AND THAT THE PEOPLE SHOULD BE ASKED PLAINLY IF THEY WANT A KING OR NOT.

WHATEVER THE TERMS OF THE REFERENDUM, IT COULD TAKE PLACE AS EARLY AS THIS COMING SUMMER.

JS/CAK